

EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONAL PLAN FROM SECONDARY EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A CASE STUDY IN THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

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One of the major goals in the education and training of individuals with special needs is to prepare these individuals for independence as adults. Brolin (1995) noted that it is obvious that career or vocational education and training provide the important foundation for successful transition from school to the community and place of work. Many issues and challenges occur during the transition process. The transitional problems of normal children can be appeased through emotional and support in the form of reassurance but individuals with special needs require more than that because they are unable to adjust to these natural shifts in life smoothly and independently. They are unable to transfer what they have learnt from a familiar setting to an unfamiliar one like normal children.

However, professionals in special education opine that transition problems can be reduced, if not solved, if parents and teachers are aware of such a need in a special child, are able to recognize it and equip themselves with knowledge that can help them guide the individual during transition. Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) noted that with appropriate training, persons with special needs can secure jobs successfully, measured by criteria such as attendance, employer satisfaction and length of employment. Appropriate training and effective transition programs can lead to meaningful employment for adults with special needs.

Statement of Problem

Nationally, many students with special needs leave the Malaysian public school system every year. Graduation is a happy and proud event for many students, but for most students with disabilities and their parents it is a time of uncertainty. Malaysian parents who have special children at the adolescent stage are facing doubts as to what would be the future of their children soon after they have finished the vocational training. An informal discussion with some parents revealed that some individuals with special needs remain at home even after the vocational training. As a result, the transition from secondary education to employment was not successful for these special children. In view of the current situation, there is a need to structure an effective transitional plan for individuals with special needs from their secondary education, primarily vocational training, to employment in Malaysia.

Objectives

Specifically, this study comprises a few objectives, as follows:

1. To explore the awareness on secondary education and employment for individuals with special needs;
2. To explore the transitional needs of individuals with special needs from secondary education to employment; and
3. To develop an effective transitional plan from secondary education to employment for Malaysian individuals with special needs.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. To what extent is the awareness on secondary education for individuals with special needs?
2. To what extent is the awareness on employment for individuals with special needs?
3. What are the transitional needs of individuals with special needs from secondary education to employment?
4. What is the effective transitional plan from secondary education to employment for Malaysian individuals with special needs?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework denotes that the awareness on secondary education and the awareness on the employment aspects will help to further explore the transitional needs from secondary education to employment, thus enable the forming of effective transitional plan from secondary education to employment for Malaysians with special needs.

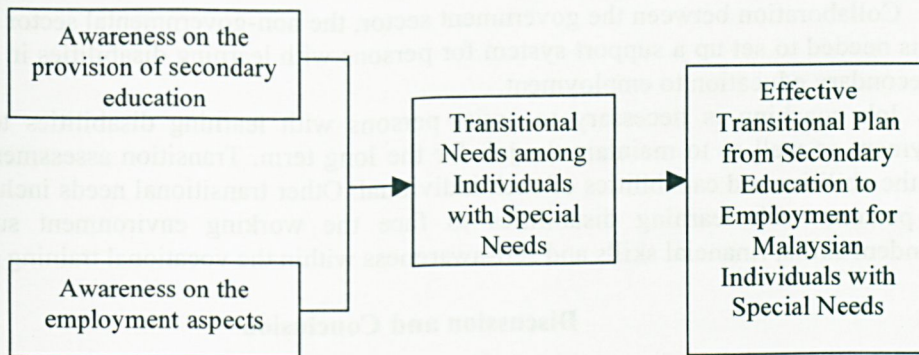


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts the qualitative approach in the form of case study design. The rationale of using case study design is that it will allow the researchers to study the situation in-depth, thus helping in the development of an effective transitional plan from preschool to primary education that emerges from the data.

Sample

Purposeful sampling is used to gather specific information from the most knowledgeable source for the research topic. Most of the participants have first hand experience in providing transition services. The participants interviewed were Ministry officers, Special Education Teachers, Coordinators of Non-Governmental Organizations, as well as persons with learning disabilities who are employees, their employers, and their parents.

Data Collection Technique

The primary method of data collection was through structured interviews to discover awareness of the provision of secondary education, awareness towards employment, and the transitional needs.

Data Validation

Triangulation was done through checking the data collected from different sources of participants to avoid any biased influence in the data collection. The data collected from interviews was triangulated by identifying emerging themes from different sources.

Findings

Persons with learning disabilities are able to have the right to the benefits that come with employment such as EPF, Socso and other entitlements. However there are barriers which exist for persons with learning disabilities such as the attitudinal barriers when they face discrimination from other employees or the employers. Some employers also seek to employ persons with learning disabilities but the barrier lies in the inability to perform the task on the job which stems from the root problem of lack of proper vocational training to prepare persons with learning disabilities for employment.

Employment training programs are a need highlighted by many participants to enable persons with learning disabilities to successfully make the transition from secondary education to employment.

Collaboration between the government sector, the non-governmental sector and the private sector is needed to set up a support system for persons with learning disabilities in their transition from secondary education to employment.

Job coaching is necessary to assist persons with learning disabilities to transition to employment as well as to maintain the job for the long term. Transition assessment is needed to assess the abilities and capabilities of each individual. Other transitional needs include the need to equip persons with learning disabilities to face the working environment such as having independent skills, financial skills and self-awareness within the vocational training program.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that there is a need for more employment opportunities for students with special needs. Currently, the employment of students with special needs can be improved by providing more vocational training centers to better equip students with special needs with skills for employment.

Past research shows that there is a need to create more awareness of the career options for learning disabled students. Williams (1998) suggests that a career fair should be held so that parents and students with special needs can gather information about relevant jobs and future employment opportunities.

It would be good if the Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of transition planning in every school and implements the policy of providing transition planning for all students with special needs. Transition personnel and a taskforce to implement the effective transition plan can be employed to improve the transition process from secondary education to employment.

Consistent with past studies by Williams (1998), the participants reveal that vocational training is important for students with special needs to learn how to recognize job opportunities and there is a need for a supportive network of resources to help students in transition from school to work.

An effective transition plan should begin from pre-vocational training from 14 years old onwards. Students with special needs who have undergone pre-vocational training should be assessed by trained transition personnel to determine their interests and needs. After the student has undergone vocational training, students with mild learning difficulties should be sent for job placement transition services to secure employment in places such as supermarkets or companies. Fabian (2007) has documented that career counseling and job placement facilitate the transition process. This process requires the consistent support of a job coach to enable successful job placement. Students who are not ready for open employment should be sent for job training at job

training centers where they are trained in a simulated environment. Students who are unable to work in open employment will be channeled to sheltered workshops.

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